

The Blood Line

Story: The Blood Line

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Author: ThatPersonYouMightKnow

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Summary: Nala decides to investigate the mysterious Family of Blood, and discovers a shocking truth about her heritage...

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: A Forgotten Past

AN: Phew! It's been a while, hasn't it, readers? But hey, I'm back with a new story for you. One that is quite pivotal to this series. And also a little creepy. Like my *Night Terrors* story from Series Two. I quite like that one. And vampires. Vampires are cool. Except when they're sparkly and have no emotion whatsoever. Those ones just suck.

The Blood Line

Chapter One: A Forgotten Past

It wasn't often that Sarafina had nightmares. At least, not since she had moved into the Pride Lands – and that had been for quite some time now. Her old pride wasn't much, and she didn't like to think about it often. The memories could be hurtful sometimes. Agonising, even. Neither she nor Nala deserved to grow up in such a place. They needed something better.

But now she no longer had restless nights. Her sleep was frequently filled with happy memories.

Unfortunately, the worst memory of all – the one that Sarafina had forgotten completely – was about to resurface...

There wasn't much to do in the pride. Most of it was just a barren, flat wasteland that no one with a single iota of common sense would go near. It was just that sort of ugly... *thing* that everyone looked at in disgust when they wandered by.

So naturally, there wasn't much for a cub like Sarafina to do.

"Bored..." she sighed, watching her own tail swish back and forth as she lay next to the bottom of a small hill. "Bored... bored... bored..."

She could feel her eyes beginning to slowly shut. The pride was so boring that it was actually putting her to sleep...

"Bored?" said a voice from in front of her.

Sarafina's eyes snapped open. "Muerto? What are you doing around here?"

Muerto was one of the few other cubs in the pride. He was Sarafina's best – and only – friend. He had light-brown fur and shiny green eyes. She knew him to be quite shy and timid at times – especially when around her. She just couldn't seem to figure him out...

"I was just, uh, walking by," Muerto told her, "and I... noticed you. Lying there. And here I am." He smiled.

"Oh, it's so boring," Sarafina complained, rolling onto her back. "There's nothing to do around here. It's actually making me stupider."

"Are you implying that you were stupid already?" Muerto asked, sitting beside her.

"Maybe I am stupid," she mused. "You'd have to be an idiot to waste your whole life around here."

"You're not stupid," Muerto assured her. "It's just the boredom. It's making you ask yourself really important questions."

"And it makes you watch your tail swish," Sarafina replied, doing just that. "Anything that moves seems interesting to me now."

"Well, just what are you going to do about it?" Muerto asked.

"What do you mean?" said Sarafina. "I can't do *anything* about it."

"There must be *something*," Muerto said. "What do you want more than anything?"

Sarafina thought for a moment. "An adventure," she answered. "Something exciting, you know? Something that won't make my brain melt."

Muerto shrugged. "Well, nothing really happens around here. The chances of any kind of adventure happening are one in thirty million – give or take."

"Why? Why? *Why*?" Sarafina moaned, unable to take any more. "Come on! There has to be something! How about a

boyfriend? Can you do that, Muerto? Can you find me a boyfriend?" She grabbed him by the shoulders, staring into his eyes. "Huh? Huh? Huh?"

"Well—"

"Oh, you're useless!" Sarafina declared, throwing Muerto to the ground. "I can't believe how dull everyone is around here. It's gonna kill me. I know it is."

"At least you've got me," Muerto pointed out, getting to his paws.

"Oh. Yeah. Great," Sarafina said flatly. "No offence, Muerto, but you're not exactly the height of excitement."

"Well, if you're so tired of me, then why do we still hang out together?" Muerto questioned.

"Oh, Muerto, I'm not tired of you," she said. "It's just... I'm tired of here. I don't want to live here anymore, Muerto."

"Then just where *do* you want to live?" Muerto asked.

"Somewhere that has a lot more going for it than *here*," Sarafina responded. "Somewhere fantastic – and I'll even take you with me! How does that sound?"

"Um... cool, I guess," Muerto replied. "But I estimate that you won't be able to leave the pride until you're an adult. You just wouldn't be able to fend for yourself out there in the wild."

"I could do it," Sarafina said confidently. "It'd be an adventure."

"An adventure?" said Muerto. "Kind of like that creepy fog that's moving right towards us?"

"Yeah, kinda like that— Wait, what?"

Sarafina focused her attention on a thick, green fog that seemed to be closing in on her and Muerto. "Um... Muerto? Do you know what this is?"

"Can't say I do," he replied worriedly. "Although I assume that it's probably meant to render us unconscious and..."

Sarafina and Muerto didn't get a chance to say anything more. They had been rendered unconscious by the sinister fog...

The fog seemed to maintain its presence when Sarafina awoke. Everything seemed... out of focus. But from what she could see, she had ended up in some kind of cavern or cave. Somewhere where there wasn't much chance of escape.

"Whoa... I feel really dizzy," she said, feeling like she was unable to even get up. It was like she couldn't move. "Just what happened...?"

A sudden sound made Sarafina freeze in fear. Something so innocent, but yet chillingly terrifying.

The sound of a cub giggling.

"*She doesn't know...*" A taunting young female voice whispered from out of nowhere. The giggling persisted. "*She doesn't know...*"

"Who is it?" Sarafina squeaked, looking for somewhere to hide. But there was nothing. Just the hard, rocky earth underneath her paws. All she could see was the green fog, or mist, or whatever it was.

"*Doesn't know...*" the scary cub giggled. "*Doesn't know...*"

Sarafina had never felt more terrified in her life. All this time she'd been longing for adventure, and now that it has finally happened, she wanted nothing more than to remain bored for the rest of her life.

"Sh-show yourself," she stammered at the voice, backing away slightly.

She let out a squeal of fright when she bumped into something, whipping around—

—to see a scruffy-looking cub pouncing at her!

Sarafina jumped away at the last moment, preventing herself from being turned into this cub's supposed lunch. She certainly looked like the type of cub to eat her own kind...

Sarafina stared at the cub with wide eyes. She looked like she hadn't taken a bath in months. That was probably true. Her fur was matted with dirt. She had light, tan-coloured fur and electric blue eyes. Her claws seemed to be permanently extended. And – this was the strangest part of all – two long, razor-sharp fangs protruded from her mouth.

She was a monster.

"Aw..." The cub gave Sarafina a look of mock sympathy. "Did I scare you?"

"Who are you?" Sarafina blurted out. She had to know.

"My name is Vitani," the cub replied, advancing towards her. "And I'm your worst nightmare."

Raising her claws, she let out a frightening hiss, ready to strike Sarafina across the face. She closed her eyes in response, waiting for the inevitable attack.

"Stop, Vitani," another female voice commanded. "She need not die."

"But, Mother..." Vitani turned around to address the unseen voice. "She is—"

"—not to be hurt," the voice interrupted.

Sarafina opened her eyes, and saw the mist shimmer slightly. A taller, much more grown-up lioness strode into view.

The similarities between the lioness and the cub were instantly apparent. She was obviously Vitani's mother. This lioness was also untidy and had fangs, but her personality seemed much more elegant. She was quite obviously the one in charge.

Sarafina just stared up at the lioness, heart pounding in her chest. She couldn't find the right words to say.

"You are scared," the lioness said, her attention focused on Sarafina. "But you need not be afraid. You are about to receive the greatest gift of all."

Sarafina trembled slightly. She didn't like the sound of that. She just wanted to go home. Cuddle up with her mother. Be safe. She hated herself for ever wanting to go on an adventure. She wanted to take it all back!

"My name is Zira," the lioness introduced herself, "but those who come to respect me call me Mother. Soon you shall be one of the respectful."

What was this Zira talking about? "One of the respectful"? That just sounded creepy. Like they were about to... cut her open and eat out her insides.

"Where's Muerto?" Sarafina asked, concerned for her friend. "What have you done with him?"

"Here's the little brat!" a male voice snarled.

Sarafina turned around to see a teenage lion throw Muerto to the ground beside him. He had to be another one of Zira's offspring. He had dark grey fur, a dusty brown mane, and bright red eyes. He was lanky and rather thin. Along with the fangs, he seemed to match the rest of his family.

"Nuka, do you have to be so loud?" Zira complained. "Our future existence depends on this cub. We don't want to frighten her to death."

"Sorry, Mother," Nuka huffed. He looked like he wouldn't mind tearing the heads from the two cubs' shoulders.

"Yes..."

That was a new voice. It was deep. It induced fear. It sounded like pure evil.

"You wouldn't want to... upset the poor cub now, would you?"

Nuka trembled slightly. Vitani looked scared. Even Zira seemed nervous.

Muerto looked up at Sarafina. "What's going on?" he whispered.

Sarafina shook her head in response. She didn't know. She didn't know anything. It was too scary for her to think.

Another lion stepped out of the fog. He looked the most dangerous of them all. His fur was completely black, and his

eyes were a piercing brown. Sarafina felt like this lion was staring into her soul itself.

"Father," Zira said to the lion, "this is—"

"—the Chosen One?" the lion finished for her. He looked Sarafina over. "Yes, it would appear so. She has a very fine neck."

Neck? Sarafina was immediately confused. Just what was *that* supposed to mean?

"Very fine indeed, Father," said Nuka, shooting a hungry glare at Sarafina. "I'd just love to take my fangs and bite right into her—"

"That's enough, Nuka," Father interrupted. "I wouldn't let you bite her in a million years. You're unfit."

Nuka hung his head low. "Sorry, Father..." he mumbled.

Sarafina just stared at Father with confusion. Unlike the others, he didn't seem to have a real name. Even Zira called him Father. Just who was he really?

"What do you think they want from us?" Muerto asked.

"I – I don't know," she stammered. "I really don't."

Father's eyes locked onto Muerto. "Why is this cub here?" he demanded, looking to the rest of his family.

"He was with the Chosen One, Father," said Vitani. "Oh, can I kill him, Father? Please, Father, please?"

Father actually seemed to consider it. "Well, it's not as if we need him."

Sarafina looked at Muerto. He was frozen with fear. Realising what they were probably about to do to him.

Father stared into Muerto's eyes. "Kill him."

It all happened in a second.

Vitani leapt at Muerto. He barely had time to even gasp before she plunged her fangs into his neck. Sarafina let out a cry of surprise.

Muerto opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He just stood there, frozen as Vitani did the unthinkable.

She was sucking his blood.

Vitani seemed to purr as she sucked the crimson liquid from his neck. She was enjoying every second of it. Feasting on him.

Eventually, she released her fangs from Muerto's neck, and he collapsed to the ground, eyes wide open. There were two small, red holes in his neck.

"Mmm..." Vitani rubbed her stomach with a paw. "That hit the spot."

"Muerto?" Sarafina collapsed to his side, tears in her eyes. "Muerto, are you okay?"

Her best friend just looked up, staring into her eyes.

"Sarafina..." he softly spoke, trembling slightly. "I always... loved..."

He didn't get a chance to finish his sentence. Muerto closed his eyes, and then he was gone for ever.

"Muerto?" Sarafina called, but she got no response from him. She looked up at the monstrous family, tears streaming down her cheeks. "You didn't have to kill him."

"Neither did we need him alive," Father retorted. "But you, on the other paw... *you* are going to be most valuable to us. Hold her down."

Vitani and Nuka grabbed Sarafina by either side, and secured her to the ground.

"Get off me! Let me go!" she screamed, but they didn't listen.

"Zira, would you mind doing the honours?" asked Father.

"But of course, Father," she replied, moving over to Sarafina.

"What do you want?" Sarafina cried. "What do you *want* from me?"

"We need *you*," Zira told her. "Our time here is limited. We need someone to make sure that our way of life is preserved for ever. We will become immortal."

Sarafina stared into Zira's eyes. "Who are you?"

"We are the Family of Blood."

Zira sank her fangs into Sarafina's neck, and the last thing she heard was the sound of her own screams...

***Chapter 2*: Chapter 2: They Live in You**

Chapter Two: They Live in You

When Sarafina awoke from the long-forgotten memory, her eyes were blood red. She sported a deadly pair of fangs. She looked much like the vampires that had bitten her, all that time ago when she was just a cub...

As if she were in a trance, she slowly got to her paws, scanning the occupants of the den.

It didn't take her long to find who she was looking for.

Snuggled up to Simba was Sarafina's own cub, Nala. She was fast asleep. Unaware of what Sarafina was about to do to her.

Licking her muzzle, a hungry smile formed on Sarafina's face. Nala was now nothing more than a tasty meal to her.

Sarafina stood beside Nala, and smoothed a paw over her slender neck. "What a sweet neck," she said, tingling with anticipation. "The blood will be even sweeter..."

Open her mouth wide and baring her sharp fangs, Sarafina prepared to bite into her daughter's neck.

Make them live... she thought, red eyes widening. *Make them thrive...*

Sarafina lowered her head—

—and then gasped in surprise, falling onto her back in horror. Her red eyes quickly changed colour, returning to their usual apple-green.

"Oh, gosh..." she exclaimed, her breathing becoming ragged. "What was I thinking?"

She couldn't believe what she had almost done. She'd almost tried to suck the blood of her own cub! For a minute, she'd believed herself to be some kind of monster...

Some kind of vampire.

Her thoughts quickly turned to the nightmare she'd had. Well, it wasn't exactly a nightmare. More of a past event that she'd completely forgotten. But how could she forget something like that?

"How could I forget...?" Sarafina asked herself in disbelief. "How could I forget... what happened that night?"

It didn't make sense to her at all. That incident with the 'Family of Blood' had definitely happened. She remembered it clearly. As if it had taken place only yesterday. The fog, and the dirty vampires, and Muerto dying...

Muerto...

But... Muerto was her mate, wasn't he? Nala's father. She'd known him to be dead. That was partly the reason why she'd moved into the Pride Lands. To forget all about it — or at least *try* to forget about it.

However, if Muerto had died when he was a cub — having his blood sucked out by that family of vampires — then how could he be Nala's father? It didn't make any sense. If Muerto wasn't the father, then that had to mean that...

Someone else was.

Sarafina sobbed, quickly realising that something was very wrong with her life. Her whole life was a lie. Muerto wasn't Nala's father. Someone had done something to her. Changed her memories. Altered her perception. Ruined everything.

"No..." Sarafina said, beginning to cry softly. "No..."

"Do not worry, cub..." a voice whispered into her ear.

Sarafina's eyes snapped onto Zira, standing right beside her. She didn't look a day older from when she had last seen her. She was exactly the same...

"You..." said Sarafina, pointing at Zira with a claw. "You..."

"You have remembered," Zira said, smiling. "You know what you have to do."

"I... What have you done to me?" Sarafina demanded.

"You are the Chosen One," Zira told her. "You will continue the Family of Blood. Continue the blood line."

"By attacking my own cub?" Sarafina asked in outrage.

Zira nodded, smiling cruelly. "Yes. You will pass the curse on for us. Make sure that we live for ever. We won't go into the darkness again, Sarafina. We refuse to."

"I won't do it," Sarafina told Zira, shaking her head. "You can't make me."

"Oh, but we can, Sarafina," Zira insisted. "You just won't know you're doing it. You're going to lead your cub right into our clutches."

"No."

"You have no say in the matter," said Zira. "You are under our control – and you always will be. You won't even remember this encounter. And you won't even remember us. Everything will seem like it once was. But we will always be there You live in us."

"*I won't do it!*" Sarafina screamed.

"Be silent, cub," said Zira, putting a paw on top of Sarafina's head. "Be silent... and *sleep*..."

Sarafina's eyes rolled into the back of her head, and she fell to the ground, asleep in an instant.

Zira chuckled, and then vanished.

It was like she was never there.

"You know, this would make a great story, wouldn't it?" Haiba said.

Simba, Nala and Haiba were stood at the bottom of the enormous gorge in the middle of the Pride Lands, staring out at the vast space.

"What do you mean?" Simba asked.

"Well, it'd be great," Haiba said. "Imagine if your evil uncle tricked you into thinking your dad had a surprise for you, and then killed you both in a wildebeest stampede, allowing him to take over the kingdom. If that's not a great idea, then I don't know *what* is."

"That's the unlikeliest thing I have ever heard," Simba responded. "Knowing my family, it'd be my *dad* who'd try to kill me. And my mom, too. Remember how they've gone completely cuckoo?"

"I still think it's a cool idea," Haiba muttered quietly.

"What are we doing here, anyway?" Nala asked. "It's hardly the adventure of the year."

"That's where you're wrong," said Simba, a sneaky smile on his face as he wandered over to one of the towering cliff walls. "Come look at this."

Nala and Haiba followed him over to a small hole in the ground. "A hole?" asked Haiba, raising an eyebrow.

"A *secret* hole," said Simba. "It's been dug out by someone. See the little claw marks in the ground?"

Nala nodded. "Oh, yeah," she noticed. "I wonder where it goes?"

"That's what I want to find out," said Simba.

"I just hope it's not the secret storage cave for a whole bunch of Uchoyo Diamonds," Haiba said. "You know how pesky those things can be."

"Why would someone want to hide them away?" Nala asked. "Isn't it better to, you know, *use* them? Ultimate control and all that?"

"I'm just saying you should be cautious," Haiba told her. "Especially after what happened the other day. For all we know,

this could be where Shocker is planning his next scheme."

"Or he could be right behind us," Simba said. "Ready to strike."

The three cubs looked at each other nervously, before turning around—

—and finding Sarafina staring right back at them.

The three screamed, jumping away in surprise.

"Mom!" Nala cried. "What are *you* doing here?"

Haiba lay on his back, clutching his chest. "I think I'm having a heart attack..."

Simba was clinging to the side of the cliff, claws digging deep into the rock. "You think you've got problems..."

"I came to see what you were doing, honey," Sarafina told her cub. "You know that it's dangerous around here. There could be a stampede."

"Been there, done that," Haiba remarked.

"Mom, we're fine," Nala assured her mother. "Simba just wants us to look inside this 'secret hole' in the ground."

"Be careful," Sarafina warned. "You never know what creepy monsters could be lurking underneath the ground. Like the Family of Blood."

"The Family of what?" asked Haiba, eyes widening slightly. "Excuse me, Sarafina, but that has to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard. By the way, did I mention you have really cute eyes?"

"Haiba, stop flirting with my mother!" Nala said.

"But it's true..." Haiba moaned, looking quite disappointed.

"So what's the Family of Blood?" asked Simba, curious.

"Well, I'll tell you the whole story, if you want," Sarafina offered. "But I warn you, it's very scary, with lots of fighting and blood and—"

"Tell us!" the three cubs exclaimed eagerly.

AN: This is a bit of a creepy one, isn't it? Plus, I bet you never knew that Sarafina actually knew someone called Muerto, did you? I'm sure he would have been a much better father to Nala than Hago was. Poor Muerto. And poor Sarafina, too. Looks like she's suffering some serious psychological problems, eh?

Oh, well. Hey-ho, it's all a load of nonsense. See you tomorrow. Don't forget to review. They're like music to my ears...

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: The Ancient Legend

AN: Hey, readers! I'm not late for once! So, I was just checking over my last story, and discovered that *Shocker's Revenge* is my most reviewed story! How about that? I thought that *Miss the Girl* – a fan favourite amongst you – would remain the most reviewed for... well, for ever, really. Looks like I was proved wrong. I guess Shocker wins over everything in the end. I swear, half of you want to marry him.

Can't blame you. I would, too.

HeeroKitsune17: Well, if you want to know when Tiny Tojo and Terrible Tama are coming back, then I shall tell you. Story number nine. Just wait two stories and they'll be back – in a much more important role this time around.

anonymous13: Haiba most certainly *did* have an aunt called Zira. Didn't think any of you would pick up on that. Just shows how clever you are really, doesn't it? There are always little secrets and hints to be found in my stories. Maybe that was one of them...

Chapter Three: The Ancient Legend

"The Family of Blood is an old legend," Sarafina told the three cubs, unaware that she herself had come into contact with them. They had made sure that Sarafina would have no memory of the incident. Not until the time was right. "The legend tells of a family of vampires."

"Vampires?" said Simba. "You mean... with fangs and red spooky eyes and stuff like that?"

Sarafina nodded. "Yes. *Exactly* like that, Simba."

"We've dealt with vampires before," Simba said. "Remember when Tama turned you into one, Nala?"

"It wasn't pretty," Nala replied. "I think the Kulaani illness you had afterwards probably had something to do with it. You almost died."

"I dated a vampire once," Haiba said. "She was surprisingly creative – like that cub I dated once with no legs."

"I don't want to hear about your sick adventures, Haiba," Simba told him. "I'm trying to concentrate on the vampire story. So what's the point of the Family of Blood?"

"To spread death and destruction throughout the world," Sarafina replied.

"Oh..." the three cubs said in realisation. "Of course!"

"They kidnap cubs in the middle of the night," Sarafina told, "and bite into their necks! Then *they* become vampires, too!"

"Oh, no!" Nala cried.

"Oh, yes!" Sarafina exclaimed. It looked like she was enjoying telling them the story – in a morbid sort of way. "They get turned into vampires, too – and the whole thing starts all over again."

"So they want to turn *everyone* into vampires?" asked Simba. "That's a pretty freaky plan."

"Hmm..." Haiba narrowed his eyes in thought. "So what happens if you turn an elephant into a vampire?"

"What?" asked Simba, confused.

"Well, elephants have tusks," Haiba pointed out, "so what happens if you give them fangs in the same place? The elephant might explode or something."

"That's very... *disturbing*, Haiba," said Simba, "but I don't think it's what we really should be focusing on right now."

"So do you think the Family of Blood are still around, Mom?" Nala asked.

"*Definitely!*" Sarafina answered. "You can't kill the Family of Blood. They're invincible. Unless, of course..."

"Unless what?" Simba asked.

"Well, it is a common myth that you can repel a vampire with sunlight. Or you can even kill a vampire by shoving a stake

right through its heart. Or, in some weird cases, garlic."

"*Garlic?*" the three cubs exclaimed.

Sarafina nodded. "Garlic, yes. They don't like it at all. Can't think why, though. It's kind of stupid."

"You're telling me," remarked Haiba. "I always thought garlic made a good necklace if you had enough of it. Certainly helped me out on my tropical travels."

"Just how many places have you been to, Haiba?" Nala wondered.

"Too many to count," he said. "There are a lot of people to date. Six trillion life forms; only one Haiba. Now, can I kiss you?"

"No."

"Ah. Thought you'd say that. Sarafina, are you single?"

"Haiba, you're not dating my mother!"

"But, *why?*" he whined. "She makes my heart race in ways I can't even imagine."

"Aw..." Sarafina gave Haiba a sweet look.

"Mom, don't tell me you're actually *listening* to him!" Nala cried.

"Well... it is kind of sweet."

"Oh, come on!"

High above the top of a cliff, a lone lioness was watching Sarafina and the three cubs talking with great interest.

"That's right, cub..." Zira whispered. "Tell them. Lead them right to us."

Another lion joined Zira by her side. "Is she ready yet?" he demanded.

"Soon, Father," Zira assured him. "Soon."

Father narrowed his eyes at Sarafina, and sniffed the air. "She has grown much older, and yet the vampire blood is still oh so very present in her."

"It can lie dormant for thousands of years," said Zira. "I myself am three thousand and four. And as for you, Father?"

"Six million." Father saw the shocked look in Zira's eyes. "I drink a lot of blood."

"But of course," agreed Zira. "It is the only way we can survive. On the blood of the innocent."

"But they do not remain innocent for long," said Father. "For as soon as we dig our fangs into their plump necks, they will become one of us."

"Unless you let them die," Zira pointed out. "Remember that little friend of hers?" she asked, gesturing to Sarafina. "Vitani sucked him dry."

"That she did," Father said. "But he was unnecessary. Too weak to become part of the Family."

"Maybe you should have let him live," mused Zira. "Then our number would be increased."

"How many of us are left?" Father asked.

"Just me, you and the children," she told him. "Not enough. All the rest... Well, they weren't strong enough to handle the power."

"What a shame," said Father, as if it were nothing.

"We're dying, Father," Zira said firmly. "How are we to survive without someone to continue the blood line?"

"She will suffice," said Father, staring down at Sarafina. "She will make her cub one of us – and the Family of Blood can continue. We will live in them."

Zira looked at Nala and sniffed the air. "I sense a great disturbance in this cub," she said. "There's something... unusual about her. Something that doesn't seem quite right."

"I sense it, too," Father agreed, "but she is the perfect one to continue the blood line. The new Chosen One."

"But what *is* the disturbance?" Zira wondered. "She has a very strange... aura surrounding her. I can't quite determine what it is."

"We will find out soon enough," said Father. "The Chosen One will come to us, and then she will discover the truth behind her heritage. She will find out who her *true* family is."

"And what about Sarafina?" asked Zira.

"Soon she will become unnecessary, too," Father said, "and then we will kill her. Her vampirism will be terminated."

"And then what?"

The trace of a smile flickered across Father's face. "The Chosen One will make us thrive. She will make us live."

He grinned widely at Zira. "We will be immortal at last."

"... and that's the end," Sarafina finished. "No one has seen the Family of Blood for years and years. But I'm sure they'll be back – one of these days."

"Probably when our backs are turned," Simba remarked. "That's what it's *always* like. You think you're having fun, and then – *wham* – you get slashed right across the face." He rubbed his cheek with a paw. "It really hurts, too."

"One question, Mom," said Nala.

"Yes, honey?"

"Um... why exactly are you telling us this?" she asked. "I mean, *why* the Family of Blood?"

Sarafina just smiled. Nala could instantly see the nervousness on her face. "I don't know what you mean, honey," she replied. "I'm only telling you the story."

Nala narrowed her eyes in doubt. She knew her mother, and when she said that, it didn't sound like it was her saying it. Like... she was being controlled. "You sure you don't know why it's important?"

Sarafina's false smile widened. "I don't know anything, Nala," she said, before walking off. "Anything at all..."

"Well, that was weird," Nala said, turning back to her friends. "Is it just me, or did my mother look a little bit... whacked out to you?"

"I'd say it was pretty obvious," Haiba replied. "At the end she sounded as dazed as someone who'd just had a rock dropped on top of their head."

"What do you mean?" asked Simba.

"Allow me to demonstrate." Haiba picked up a rock from the ground and bashed it down on top of Simba's head.

A goofy, dazed smile appeared on Simba's face and he stumbled about, chuckling. "Wow, that hurt," he giggled, before flopping to the ground.

"You didn't need to do that, Haiba!" Nala yelled.

"No," Haiba agreed. "But I wanted to."

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Nala Investigates

Chapter Four: Nala Investigates

"I don't believe it!" Nala cried, flopping onto her stomach as soon as she got back into the den. "All that time – all that digging – and for what? A bunch of rocks. So much for your 'secret Uchoyo Diamond hiding place', Haiba!"

"Hey, sorry," said Haiba. "It was only a theory. And besides, it was Simba who had the bright idea of digging through there in the first place."

"Don't put the blame on me," said Simba. "How was I supposed to know it was going to be empty?"

"We've just wasted a whole day!" Nala exclaimed. "And now I'm exhausted. I just want to go to sleep."

"Nala, I know what will make you feel better," Haiba told her, sitting by her side.

"You do?" Nala asked, surprised.

"Yes." Haiba nodded. He then grinned at Nala. "How about a nice make-out session?"

Nala pushed him away from her. "You're useless at this!" she yelled. "Simba, make sure Haiba doesn't get anywhere near me. Who knows what he'll try while I'm sleeping?"

"Nala, I'm not that sick," Haiba said, sounding offended. "Just... a *little* bit sick, that's all."

"Obviously," Nala retorted. She sighed, closing her eyes. "Oh, I don't know. I've got so many things on my mind right now."

"Like what?" Simba asked, sitting beside Nala.

"*Everything!*" Nala exclaimed. "First there's Shocker. When the heck is he going to come back and 'kill us'? Why doesn't he just get it over with? So what if he has life issues to take care of? He can do that afterwards!"

"Nala, I think you'd better calm down," Simba said. "You know what happens when you get angry."

Haiba raised his eyebrows in agreement. "You won't like her when she's angry."

"I *am* angry!" Nala proclaimed. "But I'm too tired to even care. Goodnight."

Nala closed her eyes and said nothing more. Simba and Haiba looked at each other, shrugged, and tried to get some sleep themselves.

That night, Nala tossed and turned on her spot in the den. Even with Simba's reassuring warmth coming from right beside her, she still couldn't get to sleep. There was too much on her mind.

That story that her mother had told them was lingering in Nala's mind. There was obviously something significant about it. Something that Sarafina hadn't made quite clear. She had told them that story for a reason.

Nala wondered if she was under some kind of mind control. It wasn't out of the ordinary. Even she herself had been hypnotised, brainwashed and warped to a degree that she didn't even think was possible. Sometimes it was harmless – but then other times it could be absolutely devastating, as she had learned when her own father, Hago, had mercilessly tortured her until she was nothing but a shell of her former self.

She still thought about Hago sometimes. Wondered just how that psychotic, murdering lion could have ever been her father. But it was the truth. He'd mated with Sarafina, and then changed her memories so she'd think that someone else was the father.

She hadn't told her mother the truth yet, and, to be honest, she didn't think she ever would. It was a secret that would – *should* – remain hidden for ever. It could break her mother's heart. Tear her apart, even.

The Family of Blood... Nala thought. *The Family of Blood...*

It had to mean something. It had to. Nala's mother was obviously being affected by something to do with the Family of Blood. According to the story, they hadn't been seen for many a year.

Well, maybe now was the time that they finally made their comeback. They could have done something to her mother.

Changed her for their own evil plans. There might not even be a way to reverse it.

Nala needed answers, and she needed them fast. This mysterious Family of Blood had altered her mother, and she was going to make sure that it was put right.

I've got to do something, Nala decided, getting to her paws. She glanced down at Simba, wondering whether she should wake him or not.

She shook her head. No. Simba deserved a little break. She wasn't going to drag him into another crazy, perilous situation. The poor cub had gotten into enough of those already.

This was something Nala would do herself. She had to uncover the truth – whatever it took.

Giving Simba a kiss on the cheek, Nala silently tiptoed out of the den, making sure she didn't wake anyone up.

And then she was out of the den, without anyone noticing that she'd gone.

You know, Simba, you're really bad at this hero thing, Simba told himself when he got up the next morning.

What are you talking about? he replied.

Well, think about it, he said to himself. *It's just that... you've been getting worse and worse. I mean, remember that whole Shocker thing the other day? You didn't exactly give him the royal pummelling that you know he well and truly deserved.*

Hey, he was immortal! Simba argued.

Ha! he laughed. *Isn't a hero like you supposed to find his weakness? Everyone has a weakness, Simba. Especially you. So why didn't you stop him, huh?*

I... Simba looked defeated. I don't know.

How pathetic, he insulted himself. *Face it, Simba: you're not a hero. Just a very lucky cub. It's a miracle that you've managed to survive this far. I thought you'd be dead after five minutes.*

Hey – you're supposed to be on my side! Simba exclaimed.

Don't argue with me, kid. I'm just the nasty side of you. I think you'd make a great villain if you used it more.

Oh, shut up.

You shut up.

No!

Yes!

No!

Yes!

Yes!

No! Wait, what?

"Simba!" Haiba pulled Simba to his paws, an urgent look in his eyes. "We've got a problem!"

Simba shook his head, snapping out of his argument with himself. "Wait, what? Sorry, I was arguing with myself for a second."

"Nala's gone missing!" Haiba cried. "I didn't see her when I woke up this morning!"

"What? That's ridiculous. She's lying right next to—" Simba stared at the empty spot beside him. "Oh. Explains the lack of cuddliness I was feeling this morning."

"Well, we've gotta find her," said Haiba. "And fast."

"You're sounding incredibly concerned," Simba noticed. "Since when do you act like this over Nala disappearing?"

"I'm acting like this because if Nala doesn't ever come back, then her mother will never forgive me!" Haiba cried. "Then she'll *never* go on that romantic date by the sunset! The date with her that I've always wanted."

Simba just stared at him. "Why are you so attracted to Nala's mother?"

"Darn it, Simba, there's no time for that right now!" Haiba yelled, pulling Simba towards the den opening. "We've got to find Nala before they feed her to the crocodiles!"

"What crocodiles?" Simba asked confusedly. "And who's 'they'?"

"I don't know!" Haiba replied. "But I bet they're not nice."

"I think you've lost your mind," said Simba. "Maybe you should lie down for a little bit, Haiba. How about I go search for Nala?"

"No way!" Haiba said. "I have to look like a brave and mighty hero to Sarafina! Otherwise she'll never see how sweet, charming and undeniably hot I am!"

"Just how hot do you think you are?" Simba asked challengingly.

"I'm so hot, I'm cool!" Haiba proclaimed. "And I'm so cool, I'm hot!"

"That doesn't make any sense!"

"*Exactly!* Now, there's no time to lose. Where do you think Nala's gone to?" Haiba asked.

"I don't know," Simba shrugged. "I guess Shocker could've kidnapped her? Either that or she's started sleepwalking."

"Sleepwalking?" Haiba shuddered. "You know what can happen to sleepwalking cubs, don't you?"

"No. What?"

"Well, they end up sleepwalking off cliffs!" Haiba exclaimed. "It happens quite a lot. Mostly to females."

"Oh, dear." Simba frowned. "I think we'd better find her before she ends up *killing* herself!"

AN: Simba and Haiba seem to have got themselves into a bit of confusing trouble. I wonder why Haiba is so attracted to Sarafina? I guess he prefers older lionesses, eh? He's a cheeky little one, that cub.

On a more celebratory note, I've actually given you the chapter on time! Hooray for the eradication of computer problems! Now I can fully resume my normal schedule of providing you with the entertaining stories that you love so much. I think I'm going to have some cake – just to celebrate...

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: Finding the Family

AN: Hey, readers! Back for some more creepiness and comedy fused into one? Of course you are. Everybody loves a light-hearted, bone-crunching near-death experience!

HeeroKitsune17: I don't have a Twitter, or any kind of social networking account. I hate sites like that. And I'm afraid I have to kindly decline your partnership offer. I kinda prefer working by myself. Thanks, though!

Haradion: I can make you laugh with thin air if you want. But I suppose it's Haiba that provides most of the 'funnies' around here. He's just that kind of cub, isn't he?

Chapter Five: Finding the Family

"The third left of the fourth right. There you shall find the opening."

Nala was trekking through the jungle, and ever since she'd started asking around about the Family of Blood, that was what everyone kept telling her. *"The third left of the fourth right. There you shall find the opening."*

And just what was that supposed to mean? Why couldn't anyone just give a straight answer? There was always a cryptic message to be had, or, in one case, a catchy song to sing. No one could ever speak normally around here!

"Come on, Nala..." she muttered to herself. "You'll find the third left of the fourth right eventually – whatever that means. Sure, you'll probably lose your mind first, but it's the thought that counts."

She sighed, bored. She wished now that she *had* woken Simba up. It certainly would have made this tireless journey a lot more entertaining. He'd be cracking jokes, or doing something silly. Just the usual Simba madness that she'd come to expect from him. How she missed that little cub right now...

Heck, even Haiba would have been good to bring along. Even if he was totally demented and in love with her mother. Yeah, that was pretty weird. Nala didn't exactly see why Haiba was so attracted to her mother. Then again, he did have a tendency to fall for inanimate objects, so maybe the crush on her mother was actually something *normal* to him...

"The third left of the fourth right..." Nala repeated. "The third left of the fourth right..."

She'd been going left and right for ages. The jungle was like a maze. It was so long that Nala thought it went on for ever. She didn't even know if she would be able to find her way back. But if someone knew anything about this mysterious Family of Blood, then chances are they'd be living in the jungle. Most weird things tended to happen here. Nala could recall one incident where a crazy warthog and a creepy meerkat had tried to drain her and Simba's life energy...

Yes. That was pretty weird.

"Third left... fourth right..." Nala mumbled. Her eyelids were beginning to feel heavy. She was exhausted from walking around for so long. She felt ready to collapse on the ground and take a long, well-deserved nap. "Fourth left... third right..."

Wait a minute. Was it the third left of the fourth right or the fourth left of the third right? She was so tired that she was getting confused. She had no idea where she was going now!

"Fourth... right... third..." Finally, Nala couldn't stay awake anymore, and slumped to the ground. It didn't take her more than a second to fall asleep.

Unfortunately, that was as soon as the fog started to surround her...

"Okay, Haiba, this is very important," Simba said, as he and Haiba stood at the edge of the jungle. "If you see, or hear, or smell, or *taste* anything funny, then you tell me immediately. Got it?"

Haiba nodded. "Got it. Anything weird, and I'll tell you. Same goes for you, too. I just don't know what we're supposed to be looking for."

Simba shrugged. "Something just doesn't seem right... I don't know why Nala's gone missing, but I do know that it's to do with some kind of evil plot."

"Not necessarily true," Haiba countered. "I kidnapped her once. Remember? When we first met."

"That was part of an evil plot!" Simba exclaimed.

"Not really," said Haiba. "It was only to stop a deadly war. If anything, then I was doing you a favour."

"Whatever. Let's just split up and look for clues." Simba started walking away.

Haiba stayed fixed to the spot. "Don't we always do that?"

Simba turned back around. "Uh... yeah. It's the standard... uh, procedure for... hero work." He smiled innocently at Haiba.

Haiba didn't look too convinced. "Right. If I didn't know any better, Simba, then I'd say that you were trying to get rid of me."

"Why would I want to get rid of you?" Simba asked. "I'm just saying that it'd be easier for us to split up."

"Sure, whatever," said Haiba sarcastically, walking off in a different direction to Simba. "Just don't come crying to me when you're paw-deep in trouble."

Simba watched him leave and shrugged. *What the heck was his problem?* he asked himself, before heading into the jungle.

You know what his problem was, Simba, said a familiar voice in the cub's head. *It's started.*

Simba stopped dead. *What's started?*

The neglect of your friends, he replied. *You're beginning to ignore them. Push them away. Soon you won't even be speaking to them.*

You're crazy! Simba exclaimed. *Wait a minute. Aren't I just insulting myself?*

That's the beauty of having a dark side, he said. *But if you want to get technical, then I'm more like the lazy side of you.*

What do you mean? Simba asked.

Well, Simba, what's the thing that tires you out the most?

Simba thought for a moment. *Stopping anything that wants to kill me. In short: everything.*

Exactly! Now, wouldn't it be a whole lot better for you to quit? You've done enough hero work – especially for a cub. I think you've earned yourself a nice, pleasant retirement.

But I'm the only thing stopping the Pride Lands from burning to death! Simba argued.

Ah, it'll be fine without you, he assured himself. *You deserve a break. A chance to relax, put up your paws and do nothing. Isn't that what you want?*

Simba thought for a moment. *Kinda,* he sheepishly admitted.

So, why not? he thought. *Go on. You know you want to.*

Well, maybe I should... No, but I can't... No!

Simba ignored his own thoughts and pressed on forwards, focusing on finding Nala. He couldn't just leave her to die out in the jungle because he was a little tired. That'd make him some kind of monster.

He didn't know why she'd gone, but his primary suspicion was that Shocker had kidnapped her. After all, he had sworn revenge, and he wasn't the type to just suddenly give up. He'd make sure that they were all dead.

But so soon? Surely not. It was only a few days ago. Sorting out... whatever it was had to take a lot more time than that, right?

Simba didn't know. But Nala was definitely in trouble, and he had to find her before it was too late.

Chapter 6: Chapter 6: The New Chosen One

Chapter Six: The New Chosen One

"Wow... that was a good nap," Nala said, opening her eyes—

—to find herself staring at the freakiest lioness she'd ever seen in her life.

"Hello, there," the lioness said.

Nala screamed and scrambled away, only to bump into a scruffy-looking cub.

"Don't move," the cub threatened.

"Who – who are you?" Nala demanded, finding herself caught between the two.

"You'll find out soon enough," said a new voice. To Nala's left, a threatening male lion stepped out from a thick, green fog.

"Yeah," said a voice from Nala's right. A lanky teenage lion jumped out of the fog. He seemed to be staring at her neck, for some reason... "You'd better watch it, girlie."

She was surrounded on all sides. By the four of them. This... scary family.

"Wait a minute..." Nala narrowed her eyes in realisation. "You must be the—"

"—the Family of Blood, yes," the lioness said. "And you are one of this most gifted cubs on this earth, Nala."

"How do you know my name?" Nala yelled. "And... and what have you done to my mother?"

The Family of Blood all cackled at this.

"We've granted her the greatest gift of them all, Nala," said the lioness. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Zira."

"I am Father," the male lion said.

"Nuka," the teenage lion introduced himself.

"I'm Vitani," said the cub. "Watch your neck when you're around me – I'm still teething. Oh, what I'd give for just a drop of that blood..."

Vitani looked ready to pounce at Nala there and then, but Zira stood in the way of her cub, preventing her from gaining access to Nala's blood. "Now, now, Vitani. We don't want to upset our new Chosen One."

"Chosen One?" said Nala. She didn't like the sound of that. "What's that?"

"It's you," Zira said, poking a sharp claw into Nala's chest. "Nala, you are going to become our path to salvation. We will finally have life everlasting."

Psychos... Nala thought. They're all psychos... Oh, this isn't good.

"What do you want from me?" Nala asked, glancing around the area. There didn't seem to be any kind of escape. Just that sickly green fog...

"We just need your blood, Nala," Zira explained. "To create a connection, if you will. Of course, we need the former Chosen One to *make* that connection, but that'll be easy now that we have you."

Father sniffed the air, and a frown descended over his face. "I sense a disturbance," he said to Zira.

"Disturbance?" Zira turned suspicious. "What kind of disturbance?"

Father continued to sniff the air. "A cub. No – two cubs. Close to our position."

Zira looked to Vitani. "Go and take care of the cub, Vitani," she instructed.

Vitani giggled maniacally. "Yes, Mother," she said. "Oh, I can't wait to cause them such misery and woe!"

"Yikes!" Haiba cried, tripping over a fallen twig on the ground and falling flat on his face. "Ow."

A sudden rustling sound cut through the air. Looking up, Haiba could only see what appeared to be the pitch-black opening of a cave. *Creepy cave*, he thought. *That's never a good sign.*

The rustling noise persisted. Someone was there.

"Hello?" he cautiously called out, getting to his paws. "Hello? Anyone there? Simba, is that you?"

He stood right before the cave opening, staring into the bleak darkness. "Hello?" he called. *"Hello?"*

Suddenly, Haiba felt someone grab him by the shoulders. But he couldn't see anything. Like his attacker was invisible.

"Look into my eyes," a female voice commanded.

Haiba narrowed his eyes in confusion. "I can't see your eyes."

"Oh. Well, pretend you can see my eyes."

Haiba smiled. "Okay."

"Look into them."

Haiba let out a high-pitched scream.

"Listen to me," the voice said. "You are now one of us. *One of us... One of us... One of us...*"

"So boring," Simba complained as he walked along the jungle. "It's so boring that even boredom is more interesting. And that doesn't even mean anything. I'm so bored..."

Fed up with walking, Simba sat himself down for a second, right next to a flowing river. "Boring... boring... boring..."

A sudden rustling sound interrupted Simba's boring thoughts. "Huh?" he exclaimed, looking around to see...

Nothing. No one was there.

"That's... odd," Simba said. That rustling couldn't have been caused by the wind. The light breeze wasn't nearly strong enough to make that sound. Not unless there was a storm going on. But today there wasn't a cloud in the sky. "Is anyone there?"

He got no answer. Just more rustling.

Yeah, Simba thought. *Somebody's definitely there.*

"Show yourself!" Simba demanded, taking a defensive stance. Whoever it was, they were bound to attack any second now...

A sudden roar surprised Simba, and he turned to the side to see a figure pounce at him from a thick bush.

"Ow!" Simba cried, falling onto his back. His eyes snapped open, and he stared in horror at his attacker, who was glowering down at him.

"Haiba?"

It *was* Haiba. Although, he'd clearly taken on a change of appearance. His eyes were glowing a crimson red.

"Either you haven't been sleeping much, or you're hypnotised," Simba said.

"You will die, Simba," Haiba threatened. "You will *die*..." He then smiled. "Ooh – I like the way I said that."

Simba rolled his eyes. *Yeah. Definitely hypnotised.* "Looks like even when you're being controlled, you still keep your personality."

"Quiet, infidel," Haiba snapped, "or I might just have to administer the Kiss of Death."

"Please, no!" Simba cried, eyes bulging. "*Anything* but that!"

"Hey, it's not that bad," said Haiba. "I'm actually a lot better than most people think."

Simba cringed in disgust, before shoving Haiba from his body and then making a run for it. *I don't care what he says. He isn't kissing me in a million years!*

Haiba growled, and broke into a sprint. It didn't take him long to close the distance between him and Simba. "Don't think you can escape, Simba! I'm so hot that no one can outrun me!"

"That still doesn't make any sense!"

AN: That scene where Haiba gets hypnotised is off something on the internet. But you'll never guess it in a million years. Such are my references. Well, it sure looks like Simba and Nala are in trouble. Let's just hope Haiba doesn't administer the Kiss of Death...

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: Making the Connection

AN: Am I cursed? Did I... step on a crack in the ground or something? Did I break a mirror? Did I upset a gypsy fortune teller? I wonder sometimes. These stories never go as smoothly as they used to. Remember when it was just a chapter a day? Wasn't that great? It sure was. But now, it's all over the place. Do you know why I haven't updated in a couple of days?

I was sick.

Yeah, that's right. I've been sick for the past two days. It's ridiculous. Cough, cough, cough. Sneeze, sneeze, sneeze. It never ends! I hate being sick! But, now that I'm better, I can finish this chapter and kick off the pivotal point of the series. I hope you've been able to stand the wait – 'cause I sure haven't!

Chapter Seven: Making the Connection

Simba was running as fast as he could. Having been stuck in too many of these situations to count, he presumed that after doing so much running, he would have picked up that little bit of extra strength to cajole him along.

Sadly, this didn't seem to be the case. He was panting for breath, his heart was pounding, and he felt like he was going to explode in a matter of seconds. None of this, however, seemed to stop him. The mere thought of having to suffer Haiba's 'Kiss of Death' was more than enough to propel him forwards...

"You can't escape, Simba!" Haiba's voice echoed through the jungle. "I'll get you – if it's the last thing I do!"

I hope not, Simba thought worriedly. Not only was his body racing, but so was his mind. Just how had Haiba ended up like this, anyway? Someone – or something – was quite clearly controlling him.

But what? Certainly it wasn't Shocker. He didn't seem the type to go around hypnotising others. This had to be something completely different.

"That's it," Simba gasped, darting to the side and stopping by a tree. "I'm not doing myself any favours. He won't stop chasing me until I'm either dead, or my legs have fallen off from severe exhaustion."

"Oh, Simba!" Haiba called in a singsong voice. "Where *are* you...?"

"Somewhere in the jungle!" Simba retorted in the same tone. "But you're never going to find out where—"

Haiba suddenly found Simba by the tree.

"—unless you listen to the sound of my voice, and then use that to track me down!" he finished, looking seriously embarrassed for making such a slip-up.

"Told ya," said Haiba. "Now, prepare to die!"

Simba rolled his eyes. "Do you have to be so dramatic? Murder is so much cooler when you just don't say anything at all. Haven't you learned a single thing?"

Haiba unsheathed his claws, pressing them against Simba's throat. "I'm a talking kind of guy," he said.

"I can see that," Simba gagged. "One question. Can I have a last request?"

Haiba thought for a moment. "Well, okay. What is it?"

"Could you just turn around for a moment?" Simba asked.

"Oh, sure." Haiba turned around, his back to Simba.

"Gotcha!" Simba exclaimed, grabbing Haiba by the shoulders and ramming him up against the tree. "Now, Haiba, you're gonna listen to me. What have they done to you? More to the point, who *are* 'they'?"

"I'll never talk!" Haiba declared, struggling to escape Simba's grasp. "Not unless there's some kind of romantic night for two involved."

"You can forget it," Simba retorted. "Now, I've gotta get you back to normal somehow. Um..."

Simba slapped Haiba across the face several times, as hard as he possibly could.

Miraculously, that seemed to do the trick. Haiba's eyes ceased to glow an evil red, and he looked around, confused. "Simba? What...? What's going on?"

"You were hypnotised," Simba explained. "These guys must have power over the phenomenally weak-minded."

"And you actually snapped me out of it?" Haiba asked, surprised.

"Well, it's not like you wouldn't have done the same for me," Simba said with a smile.

Haiba thought for a moment. "Well, now I would've."

"Do you remember anything about who did this to you?" Simba asked. "Because so far, I haven't seen anything."

"I..." Haiba strained to think. "I didn't see her... but she grabbed hold of me and... well, made me chase after you. I don't know who she was."

"Great..." said Simba, disappointed. So far, they were none the wiser to what was going on. It looked like this mystery was going to remain elusive for ever.

"Wait." Haiba looked up at Simba. "I don't know who did this to me, but I *do* remember where they were."

"You do?" said Simba, surprised. "Where?"

"It was some kind of cave," Haiba explained. "Really dark and... well, nasty. She came out of it. Like a monster."

"Monsters," said Simba. "They always hide out in caves. Why is that?"

"Darkness is a powerful enemy," Haiba told him. "It can instil fear into the hearts of grown lions."

"Since when do you talk like that, Haiba?" Simba asked.

"Easy," said Haiba. "I'm just using the smart part of my brain."

"Oh."

"You'd better let me go," Nala threatened, "or else."

"Or else what?" asked Zira, not concerned in the least with Nala's anger.

"Or I'll do... something," Nala told her. "Yeah! How do you like that?"

Zira rolled her eyes. For the new Chosen One, she was certainly feisty. Sarafina was never so troublesome. At least she decided to concentrate more on the fearful aspect of things as opposed to arguing with her captors all of the time. "Can you shut that big mouth of yours for more than five seconds?"

"No!" Nala replied defiantly. "In fact, I'm going to keep that big mouth of mine open for as long as I like!" She began to sing obnoxiously. "La, la, la, la, la..."

Having reached the end of her tolerance, Zira placed a paw on top of Nala's head. "*Sleep*, cub," she commanded.

Nala stopped singing, and an agreeing smile formed on her face. Come to think of it, she was kind of tired. Plus this dark, dingy cave was so nice and cosy! "Yes..." she said. "*Sleep*..."

She slumped to the ground, asleep in mere seconds.

"I should have done that ages ago," Zira reflected. "Father, has Nuka returned with the former Chosen One yet?"

"Yes, Mother! Jeez, will you stop rushing me so much?" Nuka grumbled, emerging from the fog with Sarafina on his back. "Here she is." He dumped her on the ground.

Zira smiled. "Good." She sighed, staring at Sarafina. "You've grown well, cub..." she said, smoothing the top of Sarafina's head as if she were Zira's own daughter. "Very well indeed."

"So, when do we get to start?" Nuka asked eagerly. "Huh? Huh? Huh?"

"Be silent, Nuka," Father snapped, peering at Sarafina. "She doesn't look much stronger from when we last saw her."

"But of course not," Zira agreed. "She's weak. We always prey on the weak. They're the most vulnerable." A sly smile spread across her face as her attention turned to the sleeping Nala. "And they always provide us with the strongest of offspring. Such is life."

"Then when do we begin?" Father asked. "It won't be more than an hour before the full moon is out. Then it will have been five years exactly before we transfused our own blood into Sarafina's. We don't have much time."

"Yeah," agreed Nuka. "I don't wanna die. It's nasty. I wanna live! Live *for ever*!" He cackled gleefully.

"When Vitani returns, we can begin," Zira said. "The whole Family should be present for this monumental event."

"Here it is," Haiba said, as he and Simba stood outside the entrance to the pitch-black cave where Vitani had hypnotised him. "Darkness City. Population: evil."

"Hmm..." Simba narrowed his eyes, wandering a few steps into the cave. "I can't hear anything in here."

"Not even your *screams*!" a sudden voice exclaimed, grabbing Simba by the throat. He felt sharpened claws digging into his skin.

Vitani looked to Haiba. "I see you evaded my hypnosis. Obviously you're a lot smarter than I first thought."

"Actually, no," said Simba. "I had to slap him to snap him out of it."

"Silence, cub!" Vitani yelled. "I won't have any backtalk from a baby like you!"

"Um... you kinda look younger than me," Simba pointed out. "Do you even know how old you are?"

"I'm three hundred and forty-two!" Vitani told him. "I may be a baby, but it won't be long before I'm finally a cub!"

"Three hundred and forty-two?" Haiba exclaimed. "Jeez, I've heard of dating older girls, but this is just ridiculous. By the way, did I mention that you have really cute eyes?"

Vitani gave Haiba a flattered smile. "Well, thank you."

"In fact, they're so cute, that I wouldn't mind kissing you right now," Haiba said, walking right up to Vitani and staring into her eyes. "Wouldn't you like that?"

"Me likey!" Vitani exclaimed flirtatiously, discarding Simba to the ground. "Ooh, you're a very bad boy, aren't you? I like that."

"I bet you do, baby," Haiba flirted with a cheeky grin.

Vitani giggled. "Oh, that's funny because it's true. I hope you don't mind fangs. They usually end up tearing your head off in the middle of a kiss. Sometimes I can't control myself."

Haiba shrugged. "Ah, it's no big deal."

"Good. Now, kiss me, you fool!"

Haiba and Vitani began to kiss. Simba just watched with wide eyes, unable to believe what Haiba was doing. Especially with an ugly, dirty vampire like her.

Midway through the lengthy kiss, Haiba opened his eyes and pointed a claw towards the inside of the cave, looking at Simba.

"Oh..." Simba whispered in realisation. *Now he knew what Haiba was doing. A distraction so he could get into the cave!*

He winked at Haiba, before silently padding further into the cave.

Haiba closed his eyes, and continued to make out with Vitani. *Oh, man, this is the best kiss I've had in ages*, he thought. *Distractions have their perks...*

Simba ventured further into the bleak cave, unable to even see his own two paws in front of him. "How does anyone even find their way around here?" he wondered. "I feel like I'm going to walk right into a rock – *ow!*"

Simba rubbed his aching face. "I think I just walked right into a rock." Shaking his head, he cautiously pressed onwards. There had to be something up ahead. Otherwise what was the point of this cave being so secluded from the rest of the world? Something very strange was going on.

And somehow, it all revolved around Nala.

"If I had an elephant for all those times I've fallen asleep..." Nala muttered as she awoke. She wasn't surprised this time to find most of the Family of Blood staring right back at her, evil smiles on all their ugly faces. "We meet again."

"Are you going to be cooperative this time, cub?" Zira asked.

"You can kiss my—" Nala gasped midsentence when she saw her mother lying unconscious on the ground next to her. "Mom?"

Zira chuckled. "The two Chosen Ones – together for the greater good of the Family."

"What is all this Chosen One mumbo jumbo you keep talking about?" Nala asked, getting impatient with the Family's secrecy. "If you're going to kill us, then you might as well tell me why."

"Fair enough," said Zira. "The Family of Blood has lived for hundreds of years, feeding off the blood of the poor, sick and lame. Their blood gives us life."

"And what makes us so special?" Nala asked.

"The blood is no longer enough," Zira explained. "We're very old, Nala – very, *very* old. My mate Father has lived for over six million years. We vampires have extraordinarily long lives – with the right source of life. So one day, when your mother was just a cub like you, we transfused some of our own blood into hers, thus making her half vampire. Of course, we erased her memory so she wouldn't ever remember, but now it is the time. It has been five years exactly since we granted Sarafina our gift, and we will use her first born daughter – *you* – to ensure that we attain immortality."

"How?" said Nala.

"Simple," replied Zira. "We unleash your mother's vampire side and get her to suck your blood. Then we can all suck your blood together. The freshness of it alone will provide us with tens of thousands of years more to live. We will become gods!"

"You won't get away with this," Nala told her determinedly. *Gosh, how many times have I said that now...?*

"I think you'll find that we will, Nala," Zira said. "You have no say in the matter. And your mother will be powerless to resist the control we have over her."

"I don't believe you," Nala said.

"Oh, really?" Zira bent down and whispered in Sarafina's ear. "*Awaken, cub.*"

Sarafina's eyes snapped open. They were blood-red.

Nala gasped in surprise, backing away. Her mother had turned into a monster.

Like a mindless zombie, Sarafina rose to her paws. She opened her mouth wide, as long, razor-sharp fangs slid out. Perfect for bloodsucking.

"Make us live, cub," Zira commanded to Sarafina. "Make us thrive."

Sarafina said nothing. She glared at Nala, before slowly and menacingly advancing towards her.

Nala looked around hopelessly, realising that there was no escape.

Her own mother was going to kill her.

Simba began to notice some kind of illumination in the cave. A sort of... green mist, or fog of some sort. "I've gotta be

close now... Nala has to be around here somewhere—"

Simba cried out in surprise when he felt someone roughly shoving him into the wall of the cave. He found Vitani's angry eyes staring back at him.

"You thought you could get away from me, didn't you?" Vitani asked. "That pretty cub may have been a good kisser, but nothing escapes my vampire senses."

"You know what?" said Simba, an angry look forming in his auburn eyes. "I've had enough of you."

"Funny," said Vitani. "I could have said the same thing."

She hissed monstrosly at Simba, before trying to dig her fangs into his neck. Simba pushed her to the ground, before extending his claws.

It was kill or be killed.

"You're going to regret that," Vitani snarled, before leaping right at Simba, fangs poised to suck his blood.

Simba jumped out of the way at the last second, causing Vitani to smack head-first into the wall.

She slid to the ground, eyes closed.

"Watch where you're going next time," Simba said, before running towards the mist.

"Let go of me!" Nala screamed, as Nuka and Father held her to the ground. She was kicking and writhing frantically, desperate to get away. But their grip didn't falter. They had the strength of ten lions each.

"Your mother said the same thing," Zira told her. "But do not be afraid, cub. For you will have made us the ultimate beings on this earth. The Family of Blood will be immortal at last!"

"I won't let you!" Nala cried. "You can't do this!"

"Yes, we can," Zira said simply. She turned to Sarafina. "Suck her blood," she instructed. "I want it to be pure enough for us to taste."

"Where's Vitani?" Father asked in his low, sinister tone. "She should have been back by now."

"She doesn't matter!" Zira suddenly snapped. For the first time, Nala realised that she looked quite desperate. "Her blood must be drained! We have mere minutes before the full moon is out!"

Haiba whistled to himself as he dangled from a tree branch, his hind legs held together by vines. He shot a look up at the night sky. *Looks like only mere minutes before the full moon is out.*

He thought for a moment. *Why did I say that?* He shrugged. *Oh, well.*

And he continued to whistle.

Sarafina bent down over Nala, staring at her daughter as if she didn't even recognise her.

"Mom! Don't do it!" Nala pleaded. "Don't listen to them! They're controlling you! They—"

"She can't hear you, Nala," Zira interrupted. "She will only listen to us."

Nala could only look on in horror as Sarafina's new fangs became closer and closer to her neck, nothing but inches away from piercing her skin.

"No! Don't!" Nala screamed. "*Please!*"

Nala closed her eyes as tight as she could; awaiting the inevitable sound of the fangs digging into her flesh.

Chomp!

Nala heard the sound, but didn't feel it. Was this what it felt like? Was it actually painless?

Daring to open her eyes, Nala found a most surprising sight indeed.

Simba was on top of Zira, digging his teeth deep into her neck. "*No!*" she shrieked, shaking back and forth furiously. "*Get him off me!*"

Father and Nuka made a move to help Zira, but suddenly gasped in pain, recoiling as if someone had struck them in the stomach.

Simba jumped away from Zira, watching as she put a shaking paw to her neck. She felt blood. "Oh, no..." she said, horrified. "He's drawn blood. The weak one has drawn blood!"

Nala could only watch, confused, as Zira began to shake more and more. She wasn't just scared – she was *petrified*!

"No... No... *No!*" Zira screamed at the top of her lungs, as a most extraordinary thing happened.

Her fur and skin began to peel away, revealing her gory organs in all of their glory. The same thing happened to Father and Nuka, the three of them screaming as their bodies shrivelled up and died.

Their organs dissipated, and a multitude of bones clattered to the ground, bouncing across the inside of the cave. And then...

Silence.

Nala stared at her mother, as the fangs receded, and her eyes returned to their usual, sweet apple-green colour.

"Nala...? I..." Sarafina's eyes rolled into the back of her head, and she collapsed unconscious to the ground.

Nala sighed in relief, getting to her paws and walking over to Simba. "Well, that was a close one—"

"No!" Simba interrupted, an angry look on his face.

Nala shot him a confused look. "What?"

"He was right!" Simba grumbled. "No – I was right!"

"Simba, you're not making any sense," Nala told him.

"I'm making the most sense I've made in a long time," Simba retorted. "I'm tired of this. I saw it just then. A bunch of crazy vampires ready to kill you for a reason I know nothing about. It's the same thing every day. Fix this, fix that. Where's my reward? What do I get for saving you all?"

"Simba, I—"

"No, it's my turn to talk now," he said firmly. "I'm done."

"What?" asked Nala, eyes widening.

"I'm done. I quit," he said. "I'm done being the hero. I've been thinking to myself a lot lately, and I've figured out that it's just not worth it. There's no point to any of it. The world can fix its own problems."

"You can't just quit!" Nala exclaimed. "It's what we do!"

"Not anymore," Simba retorted, before heading into the fog. "I'm though with being a hero."

Nala could only watch, horrified, as Simba disappeared from sight.

"Hey, Simba! Way to go!" Haiba exclaimed, as Simba walked out of the cave, passing him by without so much as a single glance. "You think you could untie me from these vines! That chick with the cute eyes sure knows how to play rough!"

Simba just walked away.

"Simba? Hey, Simba! Can you hear me? Simba!"

"He's not coming," said a new voice.

Haiba craned his head around to see Nala exit the cave, struggling to hold her mother on top of her back.

"What?" Haiba asked, confused.

"He's quit," Nala said. "He doesn't want to be a hero anymore."

"Huh?" Haiba was wide-eyed with disbelief as Nala walked past him. "But – but – but—"

It wasn't long before Nala had disappeared, too. *"Is anyone going to untie me?"*

Haiba frowned. "Well, this sucks."

The End

AN: Wow! The trio have... split up? This cannot be! Well, I'm the writer, so I say it is. Aren't I just evil? And sick – literally? Looks like this is going to be quite the predicament. I wonder how in the world they're going to get out of this emotional issue?

NEXT TIME: Simba, Nala and Haiba have since gone their separate ways. When an old enemy returns, none of them want anything to do with it. Can the three cubs rejoin forces, or will the world be doomed?